

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL EMPLOYERS

Tips on improving employee mental health may seem impractical for small employers or business owners – health insurance is prohibitively expensive, an HR team or individuals may be non-existent, and flexible work arrangements are only feasible for certain job functions. Fortunately, there are ways for small employers to improve mental health, even with limited resources. MHA's Work Health Survey findings show that certain non-financial perks are more important than financial compensation, can foster positive workplace perceptions, and increase employee engagement.¹

Consider Low-cost Solutions

- **Train your managers to support people.** Eight in 10 employees consider quitting their jobs because of a poor manager. Oftentimes, people are promoted to management because of their success in other roles, but without proper training, successful employees can make poor people managers. Invest in cost-effective online training programs, provide managers with allocated work time to attend training or other professional development course, and meet 1:1 with your managers to understand their strengths and areas that may need improvement.
- **Get to know your employees.** Small employers are at an advantage when getting to know each employee. Use active listening skills to learn what matters to them. Remember and note birthdays, important moments, or family hardships to show employees that you listen and care. Even if you cannot provide full holidays, consider giving early release or flexible scheduling to employees when it matters.
- **Be creative with your benefits.** Consider swapping benefits with other small employers or business. Can you negotiate discounted pricing for healthy lunch meals or a gym or yoga studio membership? Can you provide catering to employees who work over holidays? Can you rotate schedules so employees who work on a holiday have first priority for the following holidays?

Research Group Solutions

- **Expand your depth chart.** If an employee left your organization or retired on positive terms, they might be available to pick up shifts or cover on an as-needed basis. Similarly, you might know someone who works in a similar work environment who has all the skills but might need a day or two to get trained on specific software or equipment. Having people who can fill in as needed can allow your regular employees to take time off.
- **Team up with other employers.** Consider teaming up with other local employers to create a business group or join a professional employer organization. These structures allow your organization to pool resources for finance and human resources support and achieve affordable health care or other benefits.

Challenge Long-held Assumptions

- **All organizations can achieve better wellness.** After the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations discovered many creative ways to support employee mental health. Benefits and support that seemed impossible to provide before became more accessible, such as affordable telehealth options or employer-sponsored wellness apps.
- **Providing sick time is a public health imperative.** After the pandemic, workplaces are more willing to recognize the importance of sick time. Small businesses often use social media to communicate any daily schedule changes because of staffing disruptions.

1. Hellebuycck, Michelle, et al. "Mind the Workplace 2018 Report." Mental Health America, <https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Mind%20the%20Workplace%20-%20MHA%20Workplace%20Health%20Survey%202017%20FINAL.pdf>.